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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000975

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION OPENS A SMALL WINDOW FOR
DIALOGUE, APRIL 27 DEMONSTRATIONS KEY

REFS: A) Yerevan 880 B) Yerevan 947

1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Please treat accordingly.

SUMMARY

2. (SBU) Against the backdrop of the opposition call for "the last stand" on April 27, National Assembly Speaker Artur Baghdasaryan has called a meeting with the opposition to discuss the current political situation. The opposition rally and likely march April 27, and the government's response to it, will likely determine the nature of the political dialogue (or lack thereof) for the near term. End Summary.

BAGHDASARYAN TRYING TO MEDIATE

3. (SBU) In his April 23 press conference National Assembly Speaker Artur Baghdasaryan (and senior member of the governing coalition) offered to meet with opposition leaders April 26 and also condemned the authorities' heavy-handed tactics against the opposition. Baghdasaryan used a power-point presentation to describe the chain of events since the 2003 elections that he believed had led to current political impasse. He criticized the government for overreacting to the current political situation, saying, "The guillotine is not the best means of treating dandruff." The Speaker noted that the escalating confrontation could have serious consequences, namely Armenia's expulsion from the Council of Europe.

OPPOSITION AGREES TO ATTEND MEETING

4. (SBU) Opposition leaders told us that they would send two representatives to meet with National Assembly (NA) Speaker Baghdasaryan in the evening of April 26. Baghdasaryan and senior coalition members of the NA told the Ambassador April 24 that they were trying to broker a discussion in order to move the political process back into the "political sphere" rather than let the situation devolve into a police matter.

APRIL 27 DEMONSTRATIONS WILL BE KEY

5. (SBU) Opposition leaders tell us that they have not yet decided exactly what they will do tomorrow (April 27) when they gather to demonstrate, but every indication we have leads us to believe that they intend to march on the Presidential Palace. They have announced plans in the press to encircle the Presidential Palace and maintain their positions so that the President will not have access when he returns from a European trip later this week. As the Foreign Minister announced to the diplomatic corps (septel), the GOAM has clearly laid down a line for the opposition -- government and opposition behavior over the course of the next 24 to 48 hours will be crucial in setting the scene for either political discourse or possible violence.

WALKER